DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 602 EA 030 236

AUTHOR Skrla, Linda
TITLE 'emininity/Masculinity: Hegemonic Normalizations in the Public School Superintendency.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Females; *Femininity; *Instructional Leadership; Males; *Masculinity; Public Schools; *Sex Stereotypes; *Social Attitudes; *Superintendents; Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS Poststructuralism

ABSTRACT

This paper examines why the training, certification, selection, and promotion of educational administrators ensures both the continuation of white-male dominance and of leaders oriented toward bureaucratic maintenance. The report draws on a poststructural conceptualization of power--the deployment of power through normalization--to provide an alternative perspective on research about women superintendents, one that has begun to accumulate over the past decade. The text focuses on how normalization of the superintendency, which began after World War II, has lead to productive effects of power. This normalization created the desires, behaviors, rules, and practices of societal institutions such as schools. The paper describes the underlying normalization that structures the discourses and practices of educational administration, and how these normalizations operate reciprocally at both individual and group levels. It discusses how the normalization of femininity/masculinity perpetuated male dominance in the superintendency, and how the superintendency became defined at the organizational level of schooling as a masculine role. It reframes the findings of several recent research studies on the superintendency, highlighting such issues as the lack of discussion by female school administrators concerning gender roles in their work, the conception that women lack ambition to rise to the superintendency, and the roles of leadership styles and power. (Contains 38 references.) (RJM)

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Femininity/Masculinity: Hegemonic Normalizations in the Public School Superintendency

Linda Skrla

Texas A&M University, College Station

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the

American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec

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Contact Address: Department of Educational Administration, 511 Harrington, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4226; Telephone: 409 862-4198; Fax: 409 862-8373; Email: lskrla@tamu.edu

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Femininity/Masculinity: Hegemonic Normalizations

in the Public School Superintendency

> There is a problem with narratives that promise the normalcy of life, that presume a life without difference, without a divided self. What makes normalcy so thinkable in education? (Britzman, 1998, p. 80)

Fifteen years ago, in a 1984 article titled "The Crisis in Excellence and Equity," Catherine Marshall summarized statistics that highlighted the gross underrepresentation of women in public school administration at that time, and she also provided strong evidence that the relatively few women who served as principals and superintendents, as a group, did a superior job. After laying out evidence of the ongoing exclusion of women from educational leadership positions in juxtaposition with evidence of women's considerable strengths and successes in those leadership roles, Marshall posed the question, "Why have policymakers and educators failed to see that women's leadership abilities, resources, and insights are valuable?" (p. 29).

Three years later, in 1987, Charol Shakeshaft published Women in Educational Administration, a widely-read and influential book that comprehensively examined the issues surrounding women in school administration. In the chapter in which she summarized research on barriers to women's advancement into school administration, Shakeshaft commented,

> Despite more women than men in teaching, we are left wondering why, if gender is not the overriding explanation of a profession structured according to sex, are men managers and women teachers? How is it that women, more than men, are in positions low in power and opportunity? Why is it that teaching is a high opportunity profession for a man but not for a woman? (p. 93)

In 1999, a dozen years after Shakeshaft's book and a decade and a half after Marshall's article, public school administration, particularly the superintendency, continues to be overwhelmingly dominated by men. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor described the public school superintendency as the most male dominated of any executive position in the country (Björk, 1999).

The enormity of this continued male domination of the superintendency can be illustrated by data available from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The most recent AASA Study of the Superintendency (Glass, 1992) found that 6.6 of superintendents in the nation were women. According to the NCES publication Digest of Education Statistics 1997, for the 1995-96 school year, there were 14, 883 public school districts in the United States. By assuming that each public school district had one general superintendent and applying Glass's 6.6 percent figure[1], it can be estimated that in 1996, there were 982 female and 13,901 male superintendents of schools in the U.S. During this same school year, there were 2,164,000 public school teachers in the United States. Of these, 553,984 (25.6 percent) were men and 1,610,016 (74.4 percent) were women (NCES, 1997). Thus, the ratio of male superintendents to male teachers was 13,901/553,984 (.025) and the ratio of female superintendents to female teachers was 982/1,610,016 (.0006). Since "virtually all school administrators are initially recruited from the ranks of teachers[2]" (Banks, 1995, p. 70), the odds of a male teacher becoming superintendent are one in 40; for a female teacher, the odds are one in 1,667[3]. In other words, men are more than forty times more likely than women are to advance to the superintendency from teaching.

The final days of the twentieth century seem an appropriate time to reflect on the abysmal lack of progress toward equitable representation for women in the public school superintendency

that we as a nation have achieved. Despite gradually increasing numbers of women in the "pipeline" roles that typically lead to the superintendent's office, despite the predominance of women in university educational administration preparation programs, and despite a growing feminine presence in other historically male-dominated professional fields, women have made few gains in the superintendency. In short, little has changed since Marshall and Shakeshaft wrote about these same issues in the mid 1980s. Furthermore, the staggering degree of gender stratification in the superintendency that continues to disgrace educational administration receives little attention in the mainstream discourse of the profession (Scheurich, 1995).

These twin phenomena, a chronic and hugely inequitable situation and disinterest in addressing it in meaningful ways, suggest that the perpetuation of male dominance in the superintendency serves both powerful purposes and the purposes of power. Investigation of the second of these, the purposes or operation of power in the maintenance of gender stratification in the superintendency may offer useful insight into the situation. Therefore, in this paper I attempt to respond to another question posed by Marshall (1997): "What goes on in shaping training, certification, selection and promotion of educational administrators that ensures white male dominance and leaders oriented toward bureaucratic maintenance?" (p. 1) by using a poststructural conceptualization of power—deployment of power through normalization—to provide an alternative perspective on research about women superintendents that has accumulated in the past decade.

Normalizations as Productive Effects of Power

Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) distinguish between two views of power in research for social change—power as sovereignty and power as deployment. Research incorporating the first view, power as sovereignty, "give[s] attention to what groups are favored in decision making and

how the decisions distribute values to produce a context of domination and subordination—the rulers and the ruled" (p. 17). In contrast, the second view, power as deployment, concerns the productive quality of power as identified in the works of Michel Foucault. According to Popkewitz and Brennan (1998),

> This productive notion of power concerns its effects as it circulates through institutional practices and the discourses of daily life. . . . Strategically, the study of the effects of power enables us to focus on the ways that individuals construct boundaries and possibilities. . . . Foucault enables us to understand that such reasoning has multiple trajectories and to explore the various strategies through which individuality is constructed as both disciplining and productive of power. The productive elements of power move from focusing on the controlling actors to the systems of ideas that normalize and construct the rules through which intent and purpose in the world are organized. The effects of power are to be found in the production of desire and in dispositions and sensitivities of individuals [emphasis added]. (pp. 18-19)

Power as deployment or the productive effect of power, then, in contrast to sovereign power, is generative or constitutive. This type of power circulates through discourses and practices and produces the desires and behaviors of individuals and the rules and practices of societal institutions such as schools.

An example of this view of the productive effects of power is found in Jennifer Gore's (1998) contention that remarkable sameness of schooling practices across sites and through time and the apparent imperviousness of these practices to the most radical of educational reforms is linked to power relations in schools. She argues that the techniques of power that Foucault identified in his study of prisons are equally applicable to the study of schools. One of these

techniques, normalization, has particular applicability to the study of women's experiences in the superintendency. Gore described her use of the term normalization as follows:

> Foucault (1997) highlighted the importance of "normalizing judgment," or normalization, in the functions of modern disciplinary power. He explained that such normalizing judgment often occurs through comparison, so that individual actions are referred "to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed" (p. 182). For the purposes of my research, normalization was defined as "invoking, requiring, setting, or conforming to a standard—defining the normal." (p. 237).

In Gore's view, then, the technique of normalization is one of the productive effects of power in that it involves more than just comparisons to what is defined as normal; it operates to actually produce the normal through its disciplinary effects on thoughts, actions, and individual modes of being.

Additional insight on the productive effects of normalization can be gained from the work of Gordon (1980). He described these effects as operating at both individual and group (or institutional) levels:

> If the general object-material for the relations and networks of power studied by Foucault is that of the concrete forms of conduct and behaviour of human beings, then one can say that operations designed to form or re-form this material articulate themselves according to broad modalities, "microscopic" and "macroscopic": techniques which effect an orthopaedic training of the body and soul of an individual, and techniques which secure and enhance the forms of life and well-being of a population or "social body." Now it is possible to effect a partial classification of programmes, strategies and technologies

according to how their field of operation focusses within one or other of these modalities, and how a double epistemological-practical activity of shaping their material into a normal-normative-normalisable form is weighted toward the focus of the individual or that of the population. (p. 254).

Gordon's suggestion for a partial classification of "programmes, strategies, and technologies" (techniques of power) according to whether their "double epistemological-practical activity" of normalization is focused on the individual or the population offers great explanatory potential, in my view, for exploration of the issues surrounding the situation for women in the public school superintendency. Thus, in the next section of this paper I attempt one such partial classification of normalizations that operate at individual and institutional levels to produce and maintain male dominance in the public school superintendency.

Normalizations of Femininity/Masculinity in the Superintendency

In the years that have passed since Marshall and Shakeshaft's questioning of the androcentric status quo in education administration, a small but significant body of research on women administrators (conducted almost exclusively by female scholars) has accumulated. Much of this research focuses on the issues surrounding women in the public school superintendency—aspirations, experiences in the role, exits from the profession. The majority of this female superintendency research has openly attempted to depart from historic male-centered paradigms and traditional research practices. For example, several researchers have used feminist poststructural or critical feminist approaches (e.g., Brunner, 1994, 1997b, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 1998). Thus, recent research about women superintendents, at least on the surface, differs in significant ways from research conducted earlier. Certainly new views of women's

experiences that had been submerged, excluded, and merged with men's views in earlier research have emerged in these later studies.

This body of research, however, has been marginalized by the mainstream discourses of educational administration research and has had little noticeable effect on educational administration practices. To illustrate, of more that 60 sessions sponsored by Division A (administration) at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, only two sessions focus on gender issues; this paper has been prepared for one of those two sessions. Similarly, in the forthcoming 594-page Handbook of Research on Educational Administration, one chapter out of 24 deals with gender. When men continue to advance into the superintendency at over forty times the rate that women do, it is curious that the profession is no more interested than it apparently is in these issues.

I suggest that understanding of and explanation for both the perpetuation of male dominance in the superintendency and the disinterest in the phenomenon might be gained by examining underlying normalizations that structure the discourses and practices of educational administration, including the most recent research on women in the superintendency. These normalizations operate reciprocally at both individual and group (institutional and societal) levels. According to Gutting (1989):

> The choice available (and those not available) to the individual at each point in his life history could be read as due to the structure of the culture in which he lives. Conversely, the development of social structures in one direction rather than another could be read as corresponding to a specification of the sorts of individuals that can (and those than cannot) exist in the culture. (p. 216)

Thus, in a position such as the superintendency, the individuals that work in the culture adopt and adapt to the existing norms (normalizations) for what is possible and what is not possible for them to think, say, act, and be; at the same time the culture of the superintendency is shaped by the thoughts, speech, actions, and existence of the individuals who are the superintendents. This, then, is how the productive effects of power operate through normalization. The rules, expectations, understandings, and discourses that make up the normalizations in the superintendency act to produce the normal situation.

In the case of the public school superintendency, there are multiple normalizations at work, but there is, in my view, one pair of normalizations that plays a key role in the maintenance of male domination in this role. This pair of normalizations is femininity/masculinity. There have been numerous attempts, especially over the past twenty years, to identify, specify, name, and categorize the factors that influence the chronic underrepresentation of women in the superintendency (see Adkison, 1981; Banks, 1995; Lynch, 1990). Historical explanations have included socio-cultural theories (i.e., sex-role stereotyping, gender bias, discrimination, women's socialization) and structural theories (i.e., informal power structures, protégé systems). More recent research (e.g., Brunner, 1994, 1997b, 1998; Grogan, 1996) has advanced poststructural, (i.e. power, knowledge, and discourse) explanations. All of these theories, however, can be understood as undergirded by one hegemonic pair of normalizations—femininity/masculinity.

In what follows, I will discuss normalizations of femininity/masculinity that operate to perpetuate male dominance in the superintendency. I re-frame the findings of several recent research studies on the superintendency to support my claim about the primacy of these normalizations in perpetuating women's underrepresentation in the role.

Bardwick and Douvan (1971) describe the package of norms for femininity as consisting of "dependence, passivity, fragility, low pain tolerance, nonagression, noncompetitiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, yieldingness, receptivity, inability to risk, emotional liability, and supportiveness" (p. 147). Masculinity, in contrast, is typically defined in terms opposite of those used to describe femininity. Thus, a parallel and opposite list of terms could be constructed for masculinity, which would include independence, assertiveness, sturdiness, high pain tolerance, aggression, competitiveness, outer orientation, self sufficiency, stoicism, justice, objectivity, unyieldingess, remoteness, risk taking, rationality, and impassiveness.

Jackie Blount (1998, 1999) identified the historical period in which these hegemonic normalizations of femininity and masculinity took root in school administration—the years following World War II. Blount explained that during this time,

> psychologists, sexologists, educators, and social critics invested considerable energy in the effort to produce scientifically derived definitions of acceptable White middle-class femininity. . . . Gender divisions became increasingly starkly delineated, and those who defied the conventions suffered the burdens of deviance and ostracism. (Blount, 1998, p. 110)

Blount (1998, 1999) also described the role of homophobia in reifying these gendered normalizations in the ranks of teachers and school administrators. Organized and publicly supported efforts to ferret out in schools and fire men or women even suspected of being gay or lesbian lead to strict adherence to gender roles by both men and women. Thus, women adopted sweet, passive, and agreeable demeanors and submitted willingly to the males in leadership positions. Men, on the other hand, tried to live up to idealized views of masculinity. As Blount

(1999) put it, "Not only had school administration been reaffirmed as a masculine domain, but only a few men—those nearly like Greek gods, approaching the ultimate in manliness, need apply" (p. 10).

At the same time that individual women and men in school administration internalized and exemplified rigid gender roles, the culture of the institutions both produced and reflected these same normalizations. As I have argued elsewhere (Skrla, 1998),

> The package of norms associated with the superintendency in U.S. public schools is, I would suggest, constructed based on the assumption that males will inhabit this role. That is, the superintendency traditionally has been occupied almost exclusively by men (93 percent in 1992, according to Glass). These men have certain normed or socialized characteristics and behave in certain ways; society expects that men in the position will have those socialized characteristics and will behave in those socialized ways; and, thus, the role of the superintendent has been created (socially constructed) by society as masculine. More specifically, according to Bell (1988), "The expectations . . . of superintendents are likely to be based on a taken-for-granted conception of the superintendent as a middle-aged, conservative, married man." (p.8)

The superintendency, thus, became defined at the organizational level of schooling as a masculine role. Job descriptions and vacancy notices that emphasized managerial skill, budgeting knowledge, and physical plant expertise reflected this normalization.

Even though these hegemonic normalizations of femininity/masculinity emerged and solidified in educational administration more than 50 years ago, little has changed. They are still alive and well and circulating in the discourses and practices of educational administration, a point I will illustrate with examples of analytic frames that have been used in recent research on women in the superintendency.

Silence

One interesting phenomenon (which I argue is an effect of the normalization of femininity/masculinity) that has emerged at the individual level in recent research with female superintendents is silence—the inability, unwillingness, reluctance, or refusal of female school administrators to discuss gender's role in their work lives. This phenomenon has been described by Brunner (1997a), Chase (1995), Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich (in press), and Smulyan (in press), among others. The following quote from Smulyan's forthcoming work illustrates one aspect of this silence.

> Each of the women tended to examine her own life and job from an individual perspective that rarely included gender as a theoretical or political lens. . . . Even when [the participants] did see and describe issues of gender in their lives and work, they preferred not to credit gender with much influence and not to generalize from it as a way of explaining their own and others' experience. Acknowledging the role of gender in one's life seemed to undermine a [school executive's] stance as a legitimate leader in the existing structure of schools and suggested an inability to control her own life and work. I heard a disjuncture between [their] descriptions of their experience of the world as women and their ability and willingness to explore the implications of that experience. (Smulyan, in press)

Although this self-silencing behavior has only recently been described in the research literature, it is a manifestation of women's maintenance of long-standing appropriately feminine norms. That is, women are expected not to notice discrimination, and if they do notice it, they must not speak up about it (Bell & Chase, 1993; Marshall, 1993; Rizvi, 1993). As one of my dissertation study participants described the role of women in schools, "It's almost like what we used to say

about children—not being heard" (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, in press, p. 17). Thus, to be feminine is to suffer uncomplainingly in silence. To do otherwise is to risk censure for being labeled as a complainer, someone who expects special treatment, or perhaps the most pejorative term of all—a feminist.

At the organizational level, this same silencing is evident in the lack of interest in identifying and challenging sexist practices and discriminatory behavior toward women. Examples of this disinterest within the educational administration research community have were cited earlier. Another example is the lackluster record of implementing sex equity policy described by Marshall and Anderson (1995): "With little effort at monitoring, training, or enforcement, and with ample attention to protecting dominant interests from any ill effects of sex equity, gender equity is still problematic after 20 years of policy nonimplementation" (p. 176).

Ambition

Another strongly present manifestation of the feminitity/masculinity normalization is the predominant view that women do not become superintendents because they do not seek the position. This normalization is displayed at the individual level in the stories women tell about themselves and their career paths (Chase, 1995; Grogan, 1996). When women superintendents and other highly paced administrators are asked about their career paths, they most commonly describe being content in whatever role they were in, but being "sought out" for a higher position. Young and McLeod (1998) provided an illustration of this view:

> The actual positions women aspired to reflect to a large degree the gender segregation in administration identified by Shakeshaft (1987). That is, while in their certification programs and/or while seeking a position, most saw themselves as principals of elementary schools. . . . In fact, even those women who obtained superintendent and assistant

superintendent positions did not always plan to move into these positions. Most described their career progression in the following way: "it just sort of evolved." (p. 9)

I think of this as the "accidental superintendent" story. It, of course, exemplifies the normalized feminine virtue of modesty. The women themselves have internalized this normalization and articulate it by downplaying their own capabilities and ambitions. It is unclear how many women who adopt this stance or tell this story are consciously aware of the need to downplay ambition and how many truly believe that they do not aspire to leadership positions because such an option has not been in their conceptual field. Another possibility was raised by Shakeshaft (1987)—that women truly are happy in teaching roles and see teaching as a career position.

At the organizational level, the feminine/masculine normalizations about ambition play themselves out in the standard discourses of the profession. These views are articulated by powerful people and seen as nonproblematic. As Guba (1990) points out about the force of such socially shared understandings, "All social realities are constructed and shared through well-understood processes. It is this socialized sharing that gives these constructions their apparent reality, for if everyone agrees on something, how can one argue that it does not exist?" (p. 89).

I have had two vivid experiences with the feminine/masculine normalization of women's ambition for the superintendency in my very brief research career. When presenting a paper drawn from my dissertation research at the 1998 AERA Annual Meeting in San Diego, I was challenged by a highly influential superintendency scholar who attended my session on the validity of my claims that women were underrepresented in the superintendency because of the sexism and gender stratification of the educational administration profession. He told me unequivocally that there was no problem with sexism in the superintendency. Even though less than 10 percent of superintendents in his state were women, and even though the majority of the

students in his program were women, this fellow researcher assured me that women just don't want to be superintendents; they don't get the credentials; they are happy in those elementary principalships and central office curriculum roles. My second experience with this particular normalization involved an anonymous review of the same AERA paper that I submitted to a top-tier educational research journal. One reviewer commented with great certainty: "There is excellent evidence that nearly all women who become certified and seek the superintendency achieve their first position earlier and easier than their male counterparts. For whatever reason very few women educators are seeking a credential."

I am not sure to what "excellent evidence" this reviewer referred. I am aware of a great deal of evidence (see Banks, 1995; Brunner, 1994; Grogan, 1996) that suggests just the opposite—women are the majority of students in educational administration programs, they are earning superintendents' credentials in record numbers, and many women do, indeed seek the superintendency (though they themselves downplay these things as discussed above). Nonetheless the normalization that women are not ambitious (as is appropriately feminine) remains firmly in place in the discourses and practices of educational administration.

Leadership Style

Another strand of the normalization of femininity/masculinity in educational administration about which much has been written is leadership style. Numerous scholars have asserted that there are essential differences in the ways in which women and men lead (see, for example, Banks, 1995; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Helgesen, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1987). Women's ways of leadership are most often described as caring, connected, and relational, in contrast to male authoritarian or bureaucratic styles. Banks, drawing from Hollander and Yoder, stated, "Men focus more on achieving success in tasks while women seek interpersonal

successes; women put more energy into creating a positive group effort; men focus on displaying recognizable leader behavior" (p. 72). Numerous examples exist in recent research of women articulating their views of leading in a special way because they are women. One of the participants in my own dissertation study, for example said, "My personal [style] is supportive and nurturing;" another said, "I don't have the same take on authority that a lot of men do" (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, in press, p. 27).

Ferguson (1984), however, takes issue with the notion of a distinctly feminine leadership style as being anything but an attempt to turn normalized feminine behavior to fit in existing organizational cultures. That is, by validating stereotypical feminine behavior as a "leadership style," and thus avoiding stereotypically masculine leadership behaviors, women hope to be able to escape the negatives attached to violating gendered norms for individual behavior. Ferguson sees the whole feminine leadership style theory as a misguided attempt to allow women to be sweetly agreeable (consistent with normalized femininity) and also be leaders, while leaving organizational inequalities unchallenged and undisturbed.

Power

A final example of how the normalization of femininity/masculinity manifests itself in recent research on women in the superintendency is the way in which women's use of power has been described. Cryss Brunner has several published articles that have been drawn from her research studies of the ways in which women superintendents use and define power. In a 1994 piece, she said,

> The basic definition of power strongly tends to differ dependent upon the gender of an individual. . . . Women in positions of leadership in a given educational setting define power differently than men in positions of leadership in the same educational setting.

> Women in circuits of power and women in positions of education leadership in a given setting define power as the ability to get things done through collaboration and consensus building, while men in circuits of power and men in positions of educational leadership in a given setting define power as the ability to influence or lead others by having information and knowledge beyond those around them. Women define power as "power to," that is, as the ability to empower others to make their own decisions collaboratively and to carry them out through a collective, inclusive model. Men, on the other hand, view power as "power over," or the ability of one to convince others to do as he wished through any means possible. (p. 20)

Brunner's findings illustrate yet another way in which normalized feminine behavior has been turned and redefined to fit organizational norms. That is, since norms in school administration associate traditional views of power with masculinity, when women are in leadership roles such as the superintendency, they find themselves in the "double bind" that has been well described by Shakeshaft (1987), Tannen (1994) and others. In an organization that has strictly observed gendered norms, it is impossible to be simultaneously feminine and in charge. Thus, the definitions of power adopted by Brunner's participants represent an attempt to reconcile this double bind. By defining power as "power to" collaborate and empower others, these women are able to maintain appropriately feminine roles in their organizations while in leadership roles. The normalization of femininity has thus produced the normal as these women have internalized the expectations of femininity and rearticulated it as their "unique" view of power.

Conclusion

The hegemonic normalizations of femininity/masculinity that solidified in educational administration after World War II continue largely unaltered into the present day. These

normalizations are significant forces in the perpetuation of the staggering underrepresentation of women in the public school superintendency. Recent research on women in the superintendency, in spite of attempts to use new paradigms and different analytic frames for understanding women's experiences in the role, has produced findings that, in a large measure, reify these gendered normalizations. In other words, nothing has changed for women in the superintendency because, at deeper levels where these normalizations operate within individuals and organizations, nothing has changed. Individual men and women in educational administration have internalized normalizations of femininity/masculinity into their thoughts, behaviors, and desires, and they discipline themselves accordingly. At the same time, the organizational culture of education administration has structured these gendered normalizations into its rules, rituals, expectations, discourses, and practices. Thus, the "double epistemological/practical activity" (Gordon,1980, p. 254) of shaping both individuals and organizations into normalized form based on rigidly defined femininity/masculinity continues to operate largely undisturbed in the public school superintendency.

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Notes

[1]The percentage of superintendents who were women in 1952 was 6.7, according to Glass (1992). Women's representation in the superintendency declined precipitously following World War II and only began to rise very slowly within the past decade, as Blount (1998) has documented. Thus, it seems likely that Glass's 1992 figure of 6.6 percent remains a reasonable estimate.

[2]There have been several high profile exceptions to this rule in the past few years as major urban districts have hired superintendents who were private business or military leaders. Seattle and Washington D.C. are notable examples. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of superintendents still rise through the ranks of teachers, campus administrators, and central office staff. Many states require teaching experience as a prerequisite for administrator certification.

[3]This ratio is intended to be purely an illustration of the magnitude of women's underrepresentation in the superintendency. Many factors over the course of teachers' careers influence who will ascend to become a superintendent. For example, many teachers exit the profession within their first five years. Other teachers enter the workforce after retiring or leaving other fields. District factors such as size, locale, demographics, and politics; personal factors such as strengths and ambitions; and numerous other unknown and unknowable factors also influence leadership succession.